

Power Up!

On Board with BYOD

Should students bring their own personal technologies to school and use them for learning?

Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) plans, also known as Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) plans, have been gaining acceptance among an increasing number of schools—including, perhaps, yours.

Several factors are contributing to the popularity of encouraging students to bring their own personal technologies to school and use them for learning. These are just a few:

- Tablets, netbooks, laptops, multipurpose e-book readers, and smartphones have become affordable for an increasing number of families.

- More adults are experiencing the power of ubiquitous communication and information access in their own lives.

- Teachers are becoming aware of applications and teaching strategies that use personal technologies to increase student engagement.

- Districts are recognizing that they may never have adequate funding to provide a school-owned computing device to every child.



Steering in the Right Direction

Up to this point, too many schools have taken a simple approach to student-owned technologies: banning them. Other schools have simply ignored such devices or left the rules regarding them up to individual teachers. Considering the popularity and educational usefulness of these tools, however, such strategies are no longer viable. As the proverb says, “It’s easier to steer a camel in the direction it is already headed.” This camel is already heading in a singular direction—toward increased technology use.

The Importance of Having a Plan

Good planning for the influx of personal devices will minimize problems and increase the like-

lihood of the positive use of devices. Planning for a successful BYOD initiative involves the following.

Establish policies. By allowing guest access to the school’s wireless network, a district may have already passively endorsed the use of personally owned technologies in school. Districts, however, need to be proactive regarding rules, guidelines, and policies. Check to make sure the appropriate and inappropriate use of technologies described in your Acceptable

Use Policy covers personal devices as well as school-owned devices. Articulate rules in your school handbook regarding lost, stolen, or damaged personal devices. Set limits on the role of your technology staff in supporting personal technologies.

Determine a rationale for the plan. The goals of my district’s BYOD plan include increasing motivation and engagement in the

classroom, supporting differentiated instruction, increasing student access to school-provided online resources, supporting online collaborative work in the classroom, and helping classroom teachers in managing student-owned technologies. If everyone understands the why of the plan, the how is less problematic.

Meet infrastructure requirements. Although BYOD plans are often undertaken to help reduce technology expenses, there are costs that must be covered for these plans to be successful. Even if your school has a good wireless signal throughout the building, you need to consider whether you have enough bandwidth to support dozens of devices at one time as well. As resources and activities move online, a district’s digital pipeline to the Internet may need to be increased.

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Provide staff training. Although student technology use is often described as “disruptive,” your teachers may be more concerned about its “distractive” nature. Professional development must help teachers create classroom guidelines for technology use *and* help them develop lessons and methodologies that productively use these devices—for example, student polling; real-time researching, writing and peer editing; consulting experts; and constructing multimedia projects. Teachers need to be aware of the apps and methodologies that make these activities possible.

Inform parents. I shudder when I see off-brand, underpowered tablet computers offered by the local building supply store for \$99. Well-meaning parents may purchase these cheap gizmos only to find that they don’t play well with school resources. It’s helpful to send letters to parents describing how their children may be using personal devices in the classroom and listing some minimum specifications

for appropriate devices. (For a sample letter, see <http://tinyurl.com/BYOD-parent>.) With 40 percent of back-to-school shoppers purchasing electronic devices for their children in 2012,¹ parent education is crucial.

Select resources wisely. When selecting library e-books, online databases, learning management systems, and e-textbooks, part of the criteria must be how accessible these materials are on a wide a range of operating systems. In a BYOD scenario, students might be bringing smartphones or tablets running Apple’s iOS or Android, netbooks running Windows or Linux, or laptops running any number of operating systems of just about any age. Web-based materials that don’t require Flash are the most universally accessible.

Strive for equity. Consultant Gary Stager describes BYOD programs as “the worst idea of the 21st century,” predicting that such plans will institutionalize inequities of access to

technology in schools.² On the surface, this may appear true; some students will have a great device, some an old device, and some no device at all. But savvy schools will leverage BYOD projects in ways that will increase access to technology for all students. If a classroom has 30 students and five computers, it has a 6:1 student to computer ratio. If half of the students have a personal device that they can use, the ratio in the classroom becomes considerably lower. Schools will need to provide access to online resources by lending out individual devices or opening labs for students who do not have their own equipment. **EL**

¹Mielach, D. (2012, July 14). Back to school shopping goes high-tech. *Business News Daily* [Online]. Retrieved from www.businessnewsdaily.com/2837-back-school-tech.html

²Stager, G. (2011, October 8). BYOD—Worst idea of the 21st century? [blog post] Retrieved from *Stager-to-Go* at <http://stager.tv/blog/?p=2397>

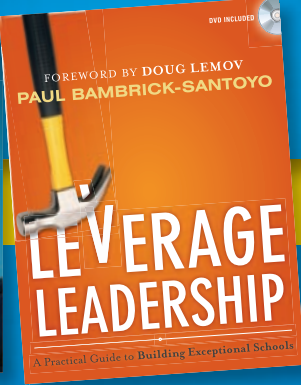
Making It Happen: What School Leaders Can Do

- Help set schoolwide rules on the use of student-owned devices and assist teachers in establishing classroom expectations for use.
- Let parents know what they should look for as they purchase personal technologies for their children.
- Recognize the need for staff development in classroom management and teaching strategies for students who have their own technologies.
- Encourage the selection of digital resources that can be used on as wide a range of devices as possible.
- Provide ways to access online resources and learning opportunities for students who do not have personal computing devices.

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